

The field of special education for those with significant intellectual disabilities has moved from a perspective of caretaking and protecting to an expectation of learning and growth. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) emphasize an access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities and their participation in yearly statewide assessments. Additionally, the 1997 Amendments of IDEA (PL 105-17) requires there be an alternate assessment for those students unable to participate in the state's general assessments with accommodations. In 2010, Arizona adopted new, more rigorous standards for all students and subsequently adopted assessments to test those standards.

Like their nondisabled peers, students with intellectual disabilities are expected to leave high school prepared to make choices: education, job, training, interests. As expectations have changed, so too have opportunities. Many students with intellectual disabilities can attend college and have long-term employment if they receive sufficient preparation. The National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) supports college and career readiness through grade level aligned instruction and an alternate assessment that evaluates progress on those standards.

There are over 230 college programs available and geared toward students with intellectual disabilities (www.thinkcollege.net). These programs provide the students with the following: opportunity to explore classes in areas of interest; employment and career preparedness and internship experience; further instruction in math, reading, and writing; continued life skills training for independent living; and extensive socialization with their nondisabled peers.

Presently, the employment data for individuals with intellectual disabilities is poor compared to those without disabilities. According to a 2014 article in the *Disabled World*, people with intellectual disabilities have an unemployment rate double that of the general population. Many of those employed were part time and paid less than the minimum wage. Any approximation of economic independence requires full time competitive employment. NCSC contends that with increased academic rigor and consistently higher expectations during their educational experience, individuals with intellectual disabilities will be better candidates for employment.

While not all students with intellectual disabilities will have the level of skills and independence to participate in in post-secondary education or competitive employment, the more they are able to do both academically and functionally will improve their outcomes for quality engagement.

A quality education with high expectations gives each the tools for choice and self-determination. The educational process of quality instruction and assessment supports students with meeting their potential. Those students with intellectual disabilities have not always been an integral part of that process, but now they are. The interest and accountability for their self-determined success after high school is now in place.